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ABSTRACT

The "back to basics" movement raises questions regarding the nature of reading that is assumed in instruction and testing. Of the three definitions of reading (decoding, meaning-from-page, and intellectual processes) the latter view, which sees reading as a broad range of perceptual, associative, and cognitive elements, is preferred. The three current conceptions of reading instruction are data driven (bottom-up), conceptually driven (top-down), and interactive; with the interactive view preferred, although most traditional reading programs which underlie the "back to basics" mandate use the decoding, bottom-up approaches. Traditionally, in intermediate grades, students are tested in comprehension, and those who perform inadequately are returned to the decoding tasks in which they have already demonstrated competence. Remedial and beginning programs should address themselves to comprehension skills. The need exists to examine the content of the reading program to be selected through mastery, to determine what a successful student needs to know, and to provide language experience opportunities. Whereas the mandate assumes academic skills exclusively are to be tested for and taught, this is based on the inadequate bottom-up decoding model of reading; testing should be modified. (Specific language experience activities for preschool are suggested.) (DF)

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EARLY READING AND PREPRIMARY EDUCATION

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Early Reading and Preprimary Education[1,2]

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The recent concern for the quality of education being provided to our children in American public schools has had a number of important consequences. One of these has been the cry for the administration of tests of minimum competencies as a requirement for graduation from high school or even for promotion from the elementary school. Another consequence has been the call for a return to teaching the basics in the schools. While professional educators might engage in discourse about what is basic to childhood, the advocates of the "back to basics" movement have one particular meaning in mind: Instruction in the mechanics of reading, writing and arithmetic.

The call for a return to basic instruction has had its impact in governmental agencies responsible for early childhood education. Policy statements and actions have already been issued advocating an increased attention to basic academic instruction. A committee of the National Academy for Education, a group supported by public funds, has issued a report asking for a total focus on basic academic skills as the content of primary education. They further advocate that the achievement of these skills be guaranteed by regular testing children using standardized achievement tests. The Administration for Children, Youth and Families has already established a Basic Educational Skills Project within the Headstart program. While the Headstart program focuses on the 3R's and their prerequisites, it has extended its conception of what is basic to include science and problem solving.

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1. Presented at AERA Conference, San Francisco, April 8-12, 1979. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the National Right to Read Conference Washington, D.C., 1978.
2. I would like to express my gratitude to Judith Chafel for her help in preparing this paper.

These are important manifestations on an educational movement that have serious implications for young children. It is necessary for early childhood educators to look at these movements, as well as at the nature of basic skills, to understand not only the thrust, but the implication of public actions (intended or achieved) on the education of young children.

Given these concerns, I have set for myself a few tasks in this paper. I would like to review definitions of reading and conceptions of reading instructional programs. I would also like to briefly discuss the relationship of reading programs to early childhood education programs more generally conceived. In addition, I should like to suggest what I might consider to be an appropriate preprimary reading program. Finally, I should like to suggest that we could use the ideas presented here and to better understand the ramifications of the public actions referred to earlier.

DEFINING READING

Some of the controversy about reading instruction arises from the way in which the reading process is defined. Some educators contend that reading is basically a decoding process -- learning to read means learning the relationship between written symbols and spoken sounds. Once these associations are learned, the child is considered a reader. Since the young child already knows the meanings of words and language structures in the oral language, reading teachers need not worry about these in their parallel written form. What the child does with written information is not reading. The goal of primary reading instruction, according to this point of view, is to provide children with the key letter-sound associations to unlock the written code. Although few will disagree with the need for the beginning reader to learn letter-sound associations, the reading process is more than "code cracking."

Some experts define reading as "gaining meaning from the printed page." They take reading one step beyond the first approach, suggesting that *interpreting* the sounds associated with the letters is also a part of the reading process and needs to be included in any reading program. They suggest that the derivation of meaning for the printed word, rather than "code cracking," be emphasized at all levels of the reading instructional program.

Still other experts suggest that the reading process is essentially an extension of intellectual processes. In addition to deriving meaning, the interpretation of meaning is a significant part of reading. Critical reading, problem solving, and other complex intellectual processes also need to be included in any reading program, including a beginning reading program.

Frank Smith (1971) conceives of the reading process as gaining meaning from the printed word. This, Smith states, is done in two different ways. The first process, *immediate comprehension*, is accomplished by deriving meaning directly from the visual features of writing. The second process, *mediated comprehension*, requires a prior oral identification of words. The fluent reader primarily uses the immediate comprehension process, employing alternative sources of redundant information to speed the process along. This information comes from word forms, syntactical structures, and the context of words. Only when difficulties arise does the fluent reader use mediated comprehension.

Smith believes that the problems of beginning readers are compounded by a lack of experience with the reading process. He suggest that traditional programs allow beginners to gain the experience they need to create personal rules of reading even though they may not be teaching these strategies directly. That fact that a redundancy of information is used by mature

readers may explain why different programs stressing different beginning reading skills may be equally successful.

Actually, each definition of the reading process may be a valid one. It is quite possible that, as Smith suggests, the reading process is different at different age or grade levels. If this is the case, then preschool teachers need an understanding of the relationship between early and more mature processes to put preschool reading activities in the proper perspective. Designing a preschool reading program would require defining the relationship between prereading experiences and mature reading, rather than just a simple task analysis and a determination of the skills which are prerequisites for beginning reading instruction.

There are four modes of language communication: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Reading is the part of the language process that deals with decoding written symbols. Although the written words of our language are derived from spoken words, the reader need not translate each word read into a word heard. Once skilled reading is achieved, the individual has thus two parallel forms of receptive language available, thus allowing immediate comprehension to occur.

In the early years of schooling, the child may have to use mediated comprehension, moving from the novel (for him) written symbol to the more familiar spoken symbol before meaning is achieved. At this point, the meanings gained from the written word are usually those the young children has already learned in relation to his knowledge of the spoken word. Thus the self-evident nature of reading as "code-cracking." Only as children approach maturity does their reading vocabulary outstrip their listening vocabulary. Few books developed for beginning reading instruction include a vocabulary that is beyond the listening vocabulary of the children for whom the book is designed. In some

cases, advocates of the code-cracking approach to reading have described very young children "successfully" reading Shakespearian plays or other similarly sophisticated written matter when they were merely mouthing the words. This is a distortion of the reading process, for few reading experts at any level would support a child's learning to read to the exclusion of understanding.

Defining the reading process does not solve the issues related to beginning reading programs, though it is a necessary first step. The crucial issues relate to *how* the child can best learn to read. Is meaningful or meaningless material best for teaching the code-cracking system? Should cues other than letter-sound associations be used in gaining meaning from the printed page? What about the form, organization, and materials of instruction to be used in a reading program? These questions are continually raised as well as questions relating to the prerequisites for successful reading instruction.

[For an interesting discussion about the relationship of reading to language from a number of viewpoints, see Irene J. Athey, "Language Models and Reading"; Doris R. Entwhistle, "Implications of Language Socialization for Reading Models and Learning to Read"; and Ronald Wardhaugh, "Theories of Language Acquisition in Relation to Beginning Reading Instruction," *Reading Research Quarterly*, vol. 7, No. 1 (fall 1971).]

THE READING PROCESS

Even in its simplest form, the reading process seems to involve a broad range of perceptual, associative and cognitive elements. While these processes may be analyzed and described separately, they are intertwined so that the individual does not practice each one separately as he reads. Nor is reading simply a matter of making a series of letter-sound associations. The scene of the preschool child roaming the aisles of a supermarket and identifying and reciting labels of packages made familiar through television commercials is not unusual. Much early reading seems to mirror this process, for in attempting

to gain meaning from the written page, the young child uses a variety of approaches and clues.

Young children can learn a reasonable number of words without using any analytic techniques. The associative learning technique used in the "look-say" method has proved successful and is probably responsible for the very young child being able to read product labels. The continually repeated association between the picture of the product and its name on television helps the child learn the words and recall them when he sees the symbol. Other techniques can be used for associating visual cues with the sounds of words.

Using these visual cues, the child can be helped to make the association between the written symbol and the spoken word. Children also learn to use a word's context as a clue to reading it. The structure of the language and the meaning of phrases have a degree of regularity that creates a fairly high chance of success in the use of context clues.

As the child begins reading instruction he learns other techniques of word recognition. Structural analysis--the breaking of large words into their parts--is an important one. Phonetic analysis, one way the child can identify letter-sound associations, is another important technique. Phonetic analysis is not the *only* method, however, that the young child can use in learning to read, nor is it necessarily the first. It would be unfortunate if we did not provide the child with as many different ways of unlocking the mystery of the written word as he can use, for it is the synthesis of many skills that helps make a competent reader.

It is important to note that word identification, although important, is just one part of beginning reading. Meanings must become evident to the

child. He must associate the written words with the spoken words and move quickly from reading *symbols* to reading *ideas*.

John Carroll (1970) has identified the necessary elements of a reading instructional program. The skills identified are:

1. The child must know the language that he is going to learn to read.
2. The child must learn to dissect spoken words into component sounds.
3. The child must learn to recognize and discriminate the letters of the alphabet in their various forms.
4. The child must learn the left-to-right principle by which words are spelled and put in order in continuous text.
5. The child must learn that there are patterns of highly probable correspondence between letters and sounds.
6. The child must learn to recognize printed words from whatever cues he can use.
7. The child must learn that printed words are signals for spoken words and that they have meanings analogous to those spoken words.
8. The child must learn to reason and think about what he reads (pp. 31-33).

The many different beginning reading programs available have been categorized in a number of ways. Differences among the programs has been identified in the stress placed by each program on letter-sound association, on the relationship of reading instruction to the total language arts program, and on the way in which the pattern of instruction is organized in each (Spodek, 1978). Carroll (1970) has suggested that disagreements about how reading should be taught are often disagreements about the order in which skills should be taught.

Adams, Anderson and Durkin (1978) distinguish beginning reading programs by the underlying conception of the reading process of knowledge. Some programs are labelled as "data driven," some as "conceptually driven," and some as "interactive." In the data driven programs, the reader attends to the letters and develops expectations from the words spelled out by them. These expectations are built upon as the reader deals with larger units, going from words to phrases to sentences. Since the information in print is the basis for reading, this is seen as a "bottom-up" process.

Philip Gough (1972), for example, proposed a linear model of the reading process which can be considered data driven. The reading process starts with visual letter identification. Letters are related to sounds in the spoken language and are then used to build phonemes. These are then grouped into words that are strung into sentences. Syntactic and semantic rules are applied to form meanings. The reading process thus moves rapidly, step-by-step in a single direction through a complex process from the visual cues to meaning.

In the conceptually driven programs, the reader uses his knowledge of the language to approach reading by testing hypotheses against what is printed. Context and syntax provide the reader with important cues for developing hypotheses. This psycholinguistic approach to reading is characterized as "top-down" processing.

Goodman (1968) has proposed such a "top-down" model of reading. Goodman assumes that the oral and written modes of language, while representationally different, are essentially the same. In this model, the child scans the printed page, focuses on a point and begins a selection process. He picks up graphic cues guided by prior choices, his language knowledge, cognitive style and learned strategies. Forming a perceptual image, he searches his memory for related

syntactic, semantic and phonological cues. He then makes a guess consistent with graphic cues and tests it for semantic and grammatical acceptability. If the choice is acceptable, decoding is extended, meaning is assimilated and expectations are formed for reading that lies ahead. At the highest level, the focus is on meaning with decoding becoming automatic. The child makes the greatest use of his knowledge of the spoken language, while decoding skills are deemphasized in this approach.

The third approach to reading sees both top-down and bottom-up processing occurring simultaneously. Hence the characterization as interactive. Within this conception the reader is as much dependent upon what he already knows as upon what the author has put in the text for gaining meaning from the printed page: Both conceptually-driven and interactive conceptions of reading view the process as something more than decoding, while the data driven conception sees reading as a process of changing written language into its oral counterpart.

Rumelhart (1976) has developed an interactive model which conceives of reading as utilizing both "top-down" and "bottom-up" processing. Both the context of the visual stimuli as well as the stimuli themselves are used by reading within this model. Thus the model suggests a process that operates in both directions (from visual cues to meaning and from meaning to visual cues) at the same time.

Many of the traditional beginning reading programs found in schools today use a data driven approach to reading in the primary grades. Only after decoding skills are established do these programs attend to the meaning and context of what is read. Thus, content of these reading programs in the early grades is different from content in the later grades. Many of the

standardized tests used to assess reading achievement reflect these programs. Children in the early grades are tested with items that sample their decoding ability. As the children move into the intermediate grades there is a shift to increasing the number of items that sample comprehension ability.

In my own community, the pattern of test scores show children doing relatively well in reading achievement at the second grade level. In the intermediate grades, the pattern of test scores does not look as well and many of the children who were doing poorly in reading are doing more poorly. In a similar vein, Cambell (1978) quotes a Utah State Board of Education report that concludes that sixth grade students in that state have mastered word analysis, but almost half lacked structural analysis skills. In relation to comprehension the picture was less satisfactory, with less than half the students mastering literal comprehension and only a fourth of them mastering adequate inferential and analytic comprehension.

While the schools provide remedial work for poor readers, this remedial work focuses on decoding skills. Yet these are the skills that the children were tested on earlier and shown to be relatively competent. Seldom do the children who need remediation ever overcome that need for remediation. Perhaps that would change if remedial reading programs as well as beginning reading programs addressed themselves to comprehension skills.

In a similar vein, a former colleague of mine reported pilot data in which he found that poorer readers persisted in the reading task focusing on decoding the passages much longer than better readers when the reading material provided became systematically more meaningless through the manipulation of both syntax and vocabulary (Canney, 1978). It was as if the poorer reader did not have an expectation of gaining meaning from the printed page.

This is consistent with Frank Smith's (1977) suggestion that reading failure occurs when a child sees no sense in what is involved in learning to read. In many cases it seems that the program of beginning reading that deny a concern for meaning from the beginning might themselves be the cause of reading failure for some children. It is no wonder that "more of the same" does not alleviate that failure.

Designing an Appropriate Early Childhood Reading Program

Whether you would include reading in preprimary education, how you would include it, and what of reading instruction you might include depend on your view of reading, of instruction, of learning and of readiness. A teacher who assumes a maturational view of readiness, would assess each young child's level of maturity, putting those who are ready into an early phase of the reading program while allowing others to "ripen" further. A teacher who maintains a "nurturing" view of readiness, might provide a set of broadening experiences for children prior to the formal reading program to increase the probability of their success in that program when it is finally offered.

Those who believe in direct instruction would teach those skills as preparation for reading or actual reading skills in a straghtforward manner. Teachers who believe in indirect instruction would create experiences to help the children acquire desired learning as a result of their own actions. The options available are not merely "directed versus incidental teaching" as King (1978) suggests, but choices of what to teach as well as direct versus indirect teaching and planned versus incidental teaching.

In many cases, teachers' decisions about what to teach children about reading prior to first grade are made by default. Not being sure themselves of what or how to instruct, teachers rely on the decisions made by publishers of reading series or others who have prepared prepackaged materials (often

workbooks and worksheets). Decisions about content and sequence of instruction are made by those preparing the materials. Once these decisions are made, the teacher's responsibility is to carefully herd the pupils through each page or section of the material. Independent evaluation is seldom done since children's progress is self-evident.

The abuses of such an approach have led a number of organizations, including, EKNE, ACEI, ASCD, IRA, NAEYC, NAESP, and NCTE to publish a joint statement on Reading and Pre-First Grade (1977). The recommendations of these groups include the following:

Recommendations:

1. Provide reading experiences as an integrated part of the broader communication process that includes listening, speaking, and writing. A language experience approach is an example of such integration.
2. Provide for a broad range of activities both in scope and in content. Include direct experiences that offer opportunities to communicate in different settings with different persons.
3. Foster children's affective and cognitive development by providing materials, experiences, and opportunities to communicate what they know and how they feel.
4. Continually appraise how various aspects of each child's total development affects his/her reading development.
5. Use evaluative procedures that are developmentally appropriate for the children being assessed and that reflect the goals and objectives of the instructional program.
6. Insure feelings of success for all children in order to help them see themselves as persons who can enjoy exploring language and learning to read.
7. Plan flexibly in order to accomodate a variety of learning styles and ways of thinking.
8. Respect the language the child brings to school, and use it as a base for language activities.
9. Plan activities that will cause children to become active participants in the learning process rather than passive recipients of knowledge.
10. Provide opportunities for children to experiment with language and simply to have fun with it.
11. Require that pre-service and in-service teachers of young children be prepared in the teaching of reading in a way that emphasizes reading as an integral part of the language arts as well as the total curriculum.

While the fact that a group of organizations would band together to publish such a statement jointly is important, neither the statement nor the recomendations themselves provide adequate guidelines for a pre-first grade reading program. If you do not accept the "ripening" view of development, then you need to look at the content of the reading program to be selected through mastery, determine what a child needs to know to be successful, and provide appropriate learning opportunities for young children.

In support of a conceptually-driven model of reading instruction, one should provide the children with as broad a range of language experiences, as well as experiences with the real world, as is possible. The depth of personal knowledge about the world allows children to develop concepts they can draw on to interpret meanings. Knowledge of the language gives the children a better base from which to derive hypotheses about the meanings of sets of printed symbols.

A range of prerequisite skills are usually listed for successfully learning to read within a data-driven model of reading instruction. These include such skills as visual discrimination, auditory discrimination, left-to-right sequencing, and developing letter-sound associations.

Given an interactive view of reading, both the skills and the linguistic-cognitive background are important. Smith (1977) suggests that two other insights need to underly beginning reading instruction: (1) Children need to realize that print is meaningful, and (2) children need to be aware that the written language code is different from that of the spoken language. Whatever the instructional model used, the child's desire to read is important for success.

In an article I wrote a couple of years ago, "Early Childhood Education and Teacher Education: A Search for Consistency", I suggested that early childhood education models differ essentially on ideological grounds, that is they differ in their underlying beliefs and assumptions. The same is true for models of reading instruction. The conceptually driven models of reading would fit quite well with a Bank Street model as well as a traditional child development model of early childhood education. The data driven models of reading instruction would fit quite well with a behavior analysis or Engelmann-Becker model of early childhood education. The interactive model of reading instruction would fit well with a Piagetian or Open Education approach to early childhood education. Thus, before deciding on an early childhood reading program it might be helpful to know what you really believe about children, learning, development and schools. Then a model of reading instruction could be selected that would be consistent with and would fit comfortably within the total program.

I would like to suggest a set of experiences that seem to me to be appropriate for pre-first grade children and important elements of a beginning reading program. This is taken from an interactive point of view.

A Preprimary Reading Program

Many pre-readiness skills can be provided for in the normal framework of a nursery school, day care center or kindergarten. These classrooms include a wealth of materials to help children develop visual discrimination skills. Using parquetry puzzles requires the child to relate the shape of each piece to the shape of the space in which it is to be inserted and to the rest of the picture. Pegsets, beads, strings, and similar materials can also be used in teaching visual discrimination. Teachers can develop

design cards for children to model. A simple pattern of one red and one blue peg alternating along the length of a line of holes in the pegboard is one that children can model, with more complex patterns following. Similar patterns can be made with beads on a string. A series of cards beginning with simple patterns and including complex designs, and design cards used with parquetry blocks of different shapes and colors, are other models. These can be used at the children's own pace, with more complex tasks being offered as they succeed in the simpler tasks.

Children can also be asked to copy specific patterns from models using crayons or pencils. Form discrimination tasks can be given to children, starting with simple geometric forms on form boards and continuing to writing letters with letter templates. A number of visual discrimination and perceptual motor programs are available on the market that may be used for this purpose. These generalized tasks are only the bare beginning. Discrimination of words and letters would need to become a continually more important part of the program.

As children learn to discriminate letters, they should also learn the names of letters. Not only is this a good reading readiness task but it also improves communication between teacher and child by providing the class with a common verbal referent. A range of word using and labeling activities can be developed to help children identify and discriminate words in meaninful contexts.

There are many opportunities to teach auditory discrimination skills in preprimary classes. Music affords opportunities for this since the child must distinguish and reproduce pitch in music as well as learn to listen to the words of songs. Instruments can be provided to allow the children to recreate patterns of sounds that differ in pitch and rhythm according to

models provided by the teacher. Again this is not to be considered a substitute for a creative music program.

A number of other techniques for auditory discrimination exist. Books such as the *Muffin* series can be read to make children more aware of sounds. There are many records and sound filmstrips that can similarly be used. Teachers can also create games for teaching listening skills such as sound recognition and discrimination. They may make their own auditory discrimination materials using tape recorders or a *Language Master*.

Just as the children need to become aware of the specific visual patterns found in the written language, they need to become aware of the sounds they hear in spoken language. Word sound can be the basis for much fun. Children enjoy alliteration and rhyming and they enjoy puns which provide fun from similarities in language sounds. While many opportunities for learning may be found in the classroom, teachers should be aware of the need to exploit situations as they arise as well as to create situations for particular purposes.

There are a host of other reading related activities that are appropriate for inclusion in a pre-first grade program. Sandberg and Pohlman (1976) describe a laboratory school program for four- and five-year-olds which includes a host of activities to support learning to read and connections are built between written and spoken language. Signs, labels and charts are used by teachers and children throughout the program. Each child develops his own collection of words which are written on separate pieces of paper and kept in a manila envelope. Books are available for children to read or be read to and a host of other activities are included.

A strong conceptual-language program can also help children develop generalized readiness for reading. O'Donnell and Raymond (1972) reported on such a program based upon kindergarten proposals developed by Robison and Spodek in New Directions in the Kindergarten (1965). This program resulted in greater gains on readiness tests and other measures than did the use of standard readiness workbooks. As a result of the program, the teachers became diagnosticians, able to assess individual children's strengths and weaknesses, and provide appropriate instruction individually and in small groups.

Piagetian theory of cognitive development has provided us with alternative modes of viewing the reading process and of suggesting activities that can help children become readers. Unfortunately, all too often Piagetian theory has been used to assess the readiness of children to benefit from traditional reading instructional tasks (see for example, Elkind, 1974, Cox, 1976 and Kirkland, 1978). Since reading is a cognitive-linguistic activity, Piaget's work can help educators understand the process of reading as an intellectual process and develop strategies to help children read in other than traditional ways.

Building from Piagetian theory, Schickedanz (1977) has developed strategies for using dramatic play to help children approach reading. Dramatic play is symbolic play. Children re-enact roles and activities in play settings. They use themselves, other persons and objects to stand for different things. Language is used to support and structure the play. A range of strategies have been suggested for teachers to extend and sustain the range of reading and language-related activities in dramatic play settings.

The idea of using play as a means for teaching reading is further corroborated by a study by Wolfgang (1974) of the relationship betw en levels of play and competence in readers among young children.

Finally, one obvious activity must be suggested in a reading program for children: reading to them. The admonition to read to young children as preparation for ther later learning to read has become popular in recent years. This is suggested because successful readers consistently report having been read to by their parents. This "reading to" is often translated into a pre-first grade activity in which the teacher regularly reads to a group of children en masse. Hoskisson (1977) and Schickedanz (1978) suggest that this is an inappropriate strategy and that the wrong elements of the parent-child reading situation are being translated into school programs. The elements of the reading situation that allow reading as information processing to develop are excluded in the mass reading strategy.

Schickedanz suggests a strategy where stories are read to children one-on-one, and where the child is allowed to see the print in the book, and to help turn pages. The same books are read repeatedly so that a story line can be memorized by the children. Adults periodically point to words as they say them, or ask children to say them. There is also free access to books for the children and listening posts with records or tapes of stories available along with the books for the children.

Hoskisson recommends a more formal strategy containing many of these same elements in a process he calls "assisted reading." At about age four or five, the child is ready for this process. In assisted reading the adult (teacher or parent) reads phrases or sentences and the child repeats these.

Books and stories are read and reread in this way as the adult moves his finger slowly under the lines that are read. At some point children will be encouraged to read words they recognize before the adult reads them. In the final stage the child is encouraged to read independently with the adults supplying words that they anticipate the child will not know. The process of moving from being read to to reading occurs as result of hypotheses the children develop and test in relation to the written language they see and have heard repeatedly.

While the Hoskisson proposal containing a number of control techniques not found in the work of Schickedanz, both approach the reading task as a total cogritive process. Assuming a cognitive-linguistic conception of reading based upon the interaction of data-driven and conceptually-driven processes, a range of other strategies could be developed and incorporated into a pre-first grade class.

Let us shift gears and look at the way in which different conceptions of the basic educational skills might be implemented in programs as well as the ways in which policy proposals might help or hinder the implementation of these conceptions.

The proposal for teaching academic skills exclusively in the primary grades and testing the children regularly to insure their learning assumes a particular approach to skills instruction. Both the proposal to limit content and the proposal to test regularly using standardized tests supports a "top-down" conception of reading, and, I believe as well, a similar limited conception of arithmetic instruction. Excluding non-skill oriented educational content from preprimary and primary classes would leave the instructional materials themselves as the only source of information about reading available to children

learning to read. A language experience approach to reading instruction would require that children be provided with broad range of experiences if the child's experiences are to become the content of the reading program. This would be denied them.

Standardized tests of basic skills each assume a certain type of instruction. Test items are supposed to sample the potential learnings of the child. If the learning experiences actually provided are significantly different from those assumed by the test developer, the test is invalid. Such a situation seldom results in throwing out the test in American education. Rather, the curriculum offered to the child is generally modified to conform to the assumptions of the test developers. Thus, the NAE proposal is a limiting one.

A review of the guidelines of the Headstart Basic Educational Skills Project and a knowledge of the context in which they will be implemented would also suggest that a limited conception of educational skills may be supported. The alternative models suggested in the guidelines might actually be alternative ways of delivering educational services rather than alternative conceptions of the educational services to be provided with the approach to skills acquisition determined by the program already in place in the cooperating elementary school. What headstart would then provide in this project is a support of existing approaches to reading, approaches that in many cases are the ones that are criticized for not adequately helping children acquire these same basic skills.

Perhaps it is time for students and practitioners of early childhood education to realize that curriculum conceptions represent educational policy. We need to serve as students of educational policy and as critics of educational policy. We need to be aware of what is being proposed for young children and

the basic assumptions underlying these proposals and to begin to influence actions so that services for young children are not only humane but are educationally worthwhile as well.

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